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SIPDIS

FOR EUR/NB (CAROLINE ULCZYCKI) AND G/TIP (MEGAN HALL)

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EN](#)
SUBJECT: ESTONIA: TIP ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSES ESTONIANS
WORKING ABROAD

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11. (SBU) Summary. On June 29, post organized and hosted a roundtable discussion on trafficking-in-persons (TIP) and TIP-related crimes for ten representatives of Estonian NGOs, labor organizations, student groups, Ministry of Justice (MOJ) officials, and representatives of diplomatic missions. The discussion focused on TIP problems associated with Estonian labor migration. The roundtable successfully introduced local TIP NGOs to labor and student organizations, thereby broadening the network of anti-TIP efforts. Additionally, an idea proposed by post to develop a recognizable label for legitimate employment agencies was eagerly received by the roundtable participants. A Russian-language weekly paper published an article on the roundtable. End summary.

Post Hosts Roundtable

12. (U) On June 29, Post organized a roundtable discussion at the Embassy between local anti-TIP NGOs, labor organizations, diplomatic missions, and the MOJ. Roundtable participants included representatives from the MOJ; the Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK); ATOLL Center, an NGO for women in prostitution; Living for Tomorrow (LFT), an anti-TIP NGO; Estonian Women Shelters Union (ENUT); the Danish Embassy; the National Resource Center for Guidance (NRCG), a national information center for Estonian students; and the Estonian office of the European Job Mobility Portal (EURES). The discussion focused on the potential TIP-related dangers facing Estonians seeking employment abroad. On July 11, MK Estonii, one of Estonia's largest circulating Russian-language weeklies, published an article on the roundtable including a summary of the main points from the discussion.

Caveat Emptor: Seeking Employment Abroad

13. (SBU) Although Estonia has experienced rapid economic growth and wages have risen quickly in recent years, salary levels are still significantly below those in many other EU countries. Wage disparities have encouraged an outflow of Estonian laborers. In a 2006 report, the Bank of Estonia estimated that roughly 10% of Estonia's labor force has gone abroad for employment. A number of unscrupulous employment agencies operating in Estonia have taken advantage of this demand for foreign employment with unfortunate consequences for their Estonian "customers." Although these agencies have not been directly linked to TIP activities, according to Eve Kyntaja, SAK Project Manager, some

Estonians using employment agency services have become victims of labor fraud and other crimes (e.g., being paid Estonian wages while in Finland, unsafe working conditions, long hours not allowed by Finnish labor law, no pensions, no holidays, etc.). Kullike Arend, EURES Director, said that under Estonian law, employment agencies are not allowed to take commissions, and are required to be run like a non-profit organization. However, in reality, Arend said that some agencies unofficially require service fees, specifically preying on people who are ignorant of Estonian labor law and aren't aware that these services are supposed to be free. "In the communist days, bribes for services were common," Arend explained, "so older people, especially Russian-speakers, are especially vulnerable as they don't realize these agencies are breaking the law."

14. (SBU) Although the GOE is aware of the illegal activities of some employment agencies, it has had difficulty shutting them down. Brit Tomingas, the MOJ's TIP Coordinator, noted that victims are reluctant to come forward to press charges. In 2006, the MOJ collected 10 complaints about employment agencies activities. However, most of the victims were reluctant to press charges and/or act as witnesses for fear of reprisal. Additionally, according to Jevgenia Zurba, LFT TIP officer, most of the victims of these agencies are from the Russian-speaking minority where there still exists a strong cultural aversion to seeking help from GOE agencies, especially the police. "In the Russian community," Zurba explained, "there is still strong Soviet mentality of not trusting the police."

Tackling the Problem

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15. (SBU) While the NGOs agreed that the police and prosecutors need to do more to punish these agencies, Roman Krolov, ATOLL Center Representative, argued that Estonian NGOs and civil society also need to be more active -- particularly in disseminating information to people seeking employment services. Krolov cited two problems in information dissemination. First, Estonian TIP-NGOs and other groups are a relatively insular group and not inclined toward information sharing outside their circle. As an example, he said that he wasn't aware that EURES, SAK, and NRCG provided services for Estonians interested in working abroad until the roundtable. He cited a number of occasions when he would have referred individuals to these groups if he had known about their work. Second, NGOs don't target their public awareness campaigns properly. "Many of the victims," Krolov explained, "are older people from the Russian community" who are less inclined to use the internet. They are very unlikely to see ATOLL and other NGO's websites which warn about these agencies. Margit Rammo, an NRCG Representative, affirmed Krolov's point by saying that the NRCG's work with high school and university students has shown that national public awareness campaigns are not effective with students. Campaigns need to specifically target young people and other specific groups to be effective. Otherwise, she opined, the reaction among students, for example, would be "not another trafficking lecture." To emphasize her point, Rammo mentioned that some employment agencies advertise on Estonian university websites. Unless students are told specifically what to look for in a legitimate agency, they could fall victim to a criminal group.

16. (SBU) An additional challenge in fighting these agencies is the fear of litigation for slander or libel. Sirle Blumberg, LTF Director, said that after her NGO warned clients to avoid certain agencies she began

receiving phone calls from unidentified individuals hinting that LTF might be sued. The other NGOs admitted having the same concern because they did not have the resources to stave off a lawsuit. Post suggested the NGOs and GOE consider developing a recognizable label that could be used by legitimate agencies on their websites or newspaper ads similar to the "organic" label now being used by Estonian organic farmers. The roundtable participants were intrigued by the simplicity of the idea. Krolov said, "Most people won't spend the extra time vetting a group, so a label or certificate would be an easy and visible alternative." Roundtable participants agreed to meet separately for further discussions on developing this idea.

[17](#). (SBU) Comment. As the Estonian NGO community is still relatively new, there is still need for more coordination and information sharing, especially with non-TIP specific groups like SAK, EURES, and NRCG. Immediately after the roundtable, these three organizations were added to the GOE's TIP network distribution list to receive information of upcoming events, meetings, and developments. End Comment.

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